

Feds suspend Bear Lake power plant proposal

By **Stephen Speckman**

Deseret News

Published: April 30, 2008

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Wednesday suspended a controversial proposal to build a hydroelectric power plant in Bear Lake's Hook Canyon.

"This is fantastic," said Jeff Salt, director of the group Great Salt Lakekeeper. "This is what we have been lobbying for."

Symbiotics' Brent Smith was told in an April 30 letter by FERC Office of Energy Projects director J. Mark Robinson that without an easement or other rights to occupy state park lands, "it appears you cannot construct your proposed project." Robinson told Smith that FERC will hold Symbiotics' project in abeyance effective immediately.

The move by FERC follows an April 28 letter to Symbiotics from the Utah Division of State Parks and Recreation, which told the Logan-based company the state will no longer negotiate with it to provide an easement to occupy state park lands for the Hook Canyon Pump Storage Project.

Days earlier, on Earth Day, Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. directed the state's parks division to halt negotiations with Symbiotics for the easement, citing a need to preserve Bear Lake "for generations to come."

In FERC's letter this week, Symbiotics was told it has 10 days from the date of the letter to file any documents that show the company can acquire fee title or rights to state park lands within the proposed project boundary.

Salt said he's concerned Symbiotics could still work out a deal at another location on the lake that wouldn't require an easement on state land or a "recreation area." Smith was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

Until this week, Symbiotics has had an active license application to build a 160-foot dam and 1,210 acre-feet capacity reservoir in Bear Lake's Hook Canyon. High profile critics like actor and

former NFL star Merlin Olsen, whose family has a cabin on the lake, said tunneling and pumping operations under water would severely impact the area's fragile ecosystem.

"I'm delighted to hear the governor has stepped forward," Olsen said last week.

If FERC decides to restart Symbiotics' licensing process, there will be a new public comment period and time to study any new proposals for a power plant project on Bear Lake.

E-mail: sspeckman@desnews.com

© 2008 Deseret News Publishing Company / All rights reserved